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SUBJECT: ELECTION OPEN HOUSE GETS ARMENIA'S ATTENTION

11. (U) On the morning of November 5, the Embassy hosted an U.S. Election Open House which packed the hall at a local hotel. Members of Parliament, the President's National Security Adviser, the Deputy Foreign Minister and other MFA officials, senior opposition figures and foreign ambassadors joined embassy staff and dozens of alumni from USG exchange programs to watch the results roll in. Two projectors and three TV screens transmitted live feeds from CNN. Another wide-screen scanned sites on the internet, providing state results and other election related information. The buzz of excitement stopped momentarily to listen to Senator McCain's concession and then President-elect Obama's victory speech.

12. (U) The media was out in force. Nine television cameras roamed the room, stopping to interview the Ambassador, other embassy officials, and prominent Armenian politicians. The event was shown on news broadcasts throughout the day and featured up front on the evening news broadcasts on all stations. Newspapers also gave the event extensive coverage next to the election results reporting.

13. (SBU) Comments to embassy officers made clear that our guests believed they were witnessing an historic moment. Senator McCain's concession speech, in particular, made a deep impact on our Armenian guests, who found the speech both astonishing and moving. Many could not help themselves from comparing Armenia's acrimonious post-election political culture unfavorably to the American example -- a priceless "teaching moment" for our work to promote democratic values. In conversation with government officials, who ventured a complaint about the Armenian opposition's lack of similar grace, the Ambassador pointed out that such civility is only possible when the political parties all know that they each have a fair chance and their turn will one day come again -- an assurance that has been distinctly lacking in modern Armenian political history.

14. (SBU) At the same time, our guests took note of President-elect Obama's efforts to reach out to all Americans, including those who had voted against him. A mock election that allowed our Armenian guests to cast ballots showed unanimous support for President-elect Obama.

Yovanovitch